

*Intending Scotland: Explorations in
Scottish Culture since the Enlightenment*
Cairns Craig

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Cairns Craig has been publishing works that examine Scottish intellectual thought since his influential *Out of History* in 1996. Any student of Scottish culture is likely to be familiar with his name either through his theoretical works or through his extensive editing career that has included *Cencrastus*, *Edinburgh Review*, and the four volume *History of Scottish Literature* (1987-89). Previously Head of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh and currently Glucksman Professor of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen, Craig is one of Scotland's most prominent and influential intellectuals.

With his latest book, *Intending Scotland*, Craig moves away from the literary focus of his earlier publications to a more holistic view of culture. The ideas discussed draw on history, philosophy, cultural theory, physics, engineering, psychology, sociology, and, in what becomes a running metaphor throughout the book, gardening.

All intellectual achievement in Scotland or by Scottish thinkers since the eighteenth century Enlightenment is open for exploration as Craig tends to the neglected history of Scottish intellectual life as though tending to a neglected garden.

Craig's stated aim is to examine three neglected groups of Scottish thinkers: scientists - namely William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), Peter Guthrie Tait, Macquorn Rankine and James Clerk Maxwell; classical scholars - John Ferguson McLennan, William Robertson Smith and Sir J.G. Frazer; and philosophers - Andrew Seth, Robert Morrison MacIver, John Macmurray and Norman Kemp Smith. However, this is no simple series of biographies: Craig's essays re-examine their achievements and test them 'against some contemporary theories of the nation and against some recent accounts of the nature of Scottish culture.' (p.12)

The book comprises six chapter-long essays developed from articles published since 2001. It starts with a fairly straightforward argument detailing how the success of Scottish gardeners was forgotten in favour of a depiction of Scotland as both agriculturally and culturally barren. However, the subsequent essays build in complexity until we end up with a final essay that seeks to redefine our notion of 'why human beings are as they are' (p.268). Although cohesive as a book, the chapters could be read individually if a reader was particularly interested in certain theories or fields of study.

In the opening chapter Cairns sets up the image of Scotland as a garden that needs to be nurtured, not neglected. This leads into to an attack on what he sees as the 'shrunkened conceptions of recent

theories of nationalism and the nation’ (p.48) It sets the tone for the rest of the book as Craig seeks to ‘challenge the ways in which Scotland’s cultural history has traditionally been described’ and ‘to bring into focus neglected aspects of Scottish history.’ (p.11)

This is followed by ‘When was the Scottish Enlightenment?’, which will be of interest to anyone engaged with Enlightenment topics as Craig explores how this period of intellectual life has been redefined by twentieth century interpretations. It also places the scientific achievements of nineteenth century Scottish scientists in a context where the impact of their work on contemporary philosophy can be understood. The next chapter, ‘Beyond Reason: Hume, Seth, Macmurray and Scotland’s postmodernity’, continues this exploration of philosophy in twentieth-century Scotland, arguing along the way that Scottish writing has been ‘postmodern’ since James MacPherson’s *Ossian* of 1760.

In Chapter 4 ‘Intended Communities: MacIver, Macmurray and the Scottish Idealists’, Craig returns to nation theory and examines it in relation to Robert Morrison MacIver’s and John Macmurray’s theories of community and personal agency. In a concise 24 pages, Craig convincingly describes how their concept of agency (‘I act therefore I am’) and the necessary relation between self and community, informed by British Idealism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, formed a philosophy that has shaped twentieth-century Scotland.

Those interested in postcolonial theory would benefit from the chapter ‘Telephonic Scotland: Periphery, Hybridity, Diaspora’. In

this section, Craig ties together theories of the core and periphery, the nature of the self and community, global capitalism and postcolonialism. He looks at how these theories interact in Scottish intellectual thought and seeks to establish a new understanding of the interaction between individuals and community.

Craig's approach throughout much of the book is to critically evaluate other theories and theorists rather than place his own theories in the foreground. This means we are first presented with Craig's summary of a particular cultural theory (prominent names in this book are Anderson, Bhabha, Nairn): Craig then goes on to either pick apart their weaknesses (particularly when applied to Scotland) or demonstrate their strengths. Particularly harsh criticism is meted out to Eleanor Bell, Laurence Nicoll, and David McCrone for what Craig evidently sees as 'woolly-thinking' and poor research.

Craig's own theories and standpoints are glimpsed between these critiques. It is clear from the content, however, that Craig's objective is to lead by example in mapping out existing intellectual thought in different fields in different periods of Scotland's history. He criticises approaches where

Scotland is always the *object* of an understanding that can only come from outside Scotland itself, never a *subject* capable of understanding itself. (p.227).

His own references are neither narrowly limited to Scotland nor prioritise non-Scottish theories over Scottish ones; he seeks a balance between what international intellectual thought can contribute to Scotland and what Scotland can contribute to

humanity's understanding of itself.

His dismantling of prominent cultural theorists and philosophers in favour of his neglected thinkers is very thoroughly researched and argued. This is not, however, an introduction to the field: while Craig doesn't assume the reader should be familiar with all the theories and texts under discussion, it is often an advantage as the reader could otherwise struggle with some of the more dense theoretical debate. On one hand, this is a work aimed at intellectuals who are familiar with cultural debate in Scotland and which challenges them to tend to aspects of Scottish culture Craig believes they have neglected. On the other hand, as it draws on so many disciplines, there is a lot of intellectual nourishment to be had for, say, a student of literature to encounter ideas from physics and other fields.

This garden path that Craig creates to lead us through Scottish thought over three centuries had this reviewer occasionally losing the way in the dense undergrowth of philosophy, but the sights and colours were rich and, at times, a revelation. This is a path that could be re-tread many times as the garden will reveal a new delight each time. A well tended garden indeed.

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